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Facilities Reduction Program demolishes old bunkers, reduces carbon footprint for Katterbach community

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Seemingly, striking a balance between building necessary facilities to support the mission and helping to maintain a pleasant and healthy environment would be impossible. However, the U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville's Facilities Reduction Program (FRP) has proven it can be done.

The FRP team is completing a large scale demolition project in Urlas, a small military community in Katterbach, Germany, and reducing its carbon footprint. The team is tearing down 18 old bunkers in order to build 138 housing units for American Soldiers and their Families, while meeting strict German requirements for reducing their carbon footprint. In the past, the heavily guarded site was used as a military training site for Soldiers and the bunkers served as an ammunition storage area for the 1st Armored Division. Since the withdrawal of the division, the bunkers were used to store old furniture and equipment.

According to Norman Cotter, program manager, Installation Management Command-Europe Engineering Division, there is an increased focus on global warming and many governmental agencies are now examining ways to reduce their greenhouse gases as environmental issues gain traction.

Cotter has worked closely with contractors and project managers on the Urlas project to ensure all environmental measures are taken as the project is completed.

"There is an increased focus on military construction and its effect on our environment on the international level," Cotter said. "Governments in other nations are examining each building effort more closely in an effort to protect what little space (land) is left to build on. They want to preserve their natural resources and protect plant and animal life whenever possible. We (Americans) don't want to do anything that will upset this balance either."

Cotter explained that in Germany there is a very unique situation in regard to new construction. Agencies are land-locked to spaces available.

"Because of the lack of space, we have to come up with innovative ways to meet the needs of our growing military community. Getting rid of the bunkers and creating housing areas was both creative and environmentally 'friendly'," he said.

Demolition began Feb. 11, and workers are now recycling concrete and asphalt, stone, steel, grass and soil from the bunkers and surrounding area. In adherence to strict German construction laws, the materials cannot simply be sent to a landfill. Cotter said recycling these materials is a very large effort. To date, they have compiled more than 20 different piles of contaminated and uncontaminated material. The uncontaminated materials are handled differently and will be used for recycling purposes.

"The large stone chunks must be crushed into smaller stone that will be reused for the foundation of road construction, and concrete is crushed into even smaller particles that will be completely recycled. Each bunker houses massive steel walls that will be recycled and sold on the open market, Cotter said. "Amazingly, they (German government) have even found a use for the abounding grassy soil that encompasses the bunkers — it will be stored and remixed to spread out over the entire site as topsoil prior to new construction."

Thad Stripling, the FRP program manager, oversees funds for the Urlas project. Stripling stresses the impact of the savings for the customer and the Huntsville Center.

"Following the strict environmental guidelines set forth by the host country will play an important role in the successful completion of our mission. The Germans are giving us discounts and incentives to protect their environment, and these savings allow the Army to provide high-quality facilities for the American troops and their Families," Stripling said.

According to Stripling, there is significant focus on recycling and reusing materials in Europe. Recycling and reusing materials allows us to reduce our project costs. Reducing our project costs allow the program funds to go further, and we get more done with less," he said.

Demolition at Urlas will end in May and the housing construction of the first 138 townhouse units for American Soldiers and their Families will begin late this summer. An exchange, commissary, lodge and school are to follow. The demolition project is just one of many projects that serves a requirement to change this former troop training area into a suburb-type community by 2020.

Dave Shockley, chief of the Programs Integration Branch at Huntsville Center, said this effort will take place in several phases that are largely driven by a focus on environmental protection and reducing their carbon footprint.

"While the German government is pleased that we have taken several steps that have lessened our 'footprint,' and have actually provided us incentives toward this effort, it's more of a social consciousness program for them," Shockley said.

"Understanding what the best removal methods are and then going the extra mile to ensure they're used produces amazing results. It sounds too good to be true, but making projects more environmentally friendly has driven facility reduction costs down, way down," he said.

Shockley and Stripling agree these savings are good news for FRP and the Huntsville Center.

"As the FRP involvement beyond the continental U.S. continues to grow and expand, so will an added emphasis on the Huntsville Center and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to meet the Army's mission requirement, while at the same time finding new and improved ways of recycling and reusing materials and reducing the construction and demolition waste stream," Stripling said.

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Sidebar:

What is a carbon footprint?

A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases produced both directly and indirectly in the delivery of a product or service. It's either expressed as equivalent tons of carbon dioxide or tons of carbon. These greenhouse gases act like a blanket, trapping heat near the Earth's surface and warming the planet. A true carbon footprint includes carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and hydroflourocarbons.

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